

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 772

By Wilder

A RESOLUTION to congratulate John J. Ross, Jr. of Savannah upon being named "2003 Tree Farmer of the Year" by the Tennessee Forestry Association.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly are pleased to specially recognize those outstanding citizens of our state who have committed themselves to sustaining the renewable natural resources of Tennessee in a manner that provides both economic enrichment and recreational pleasure while carefully husbanding and preserving valuable resources and biodiversity; and

WHEREAS, one such dedicated conservationist is Mr. John J. Ross, Jr. of Savannah, an attorney in the firm of Ross and Barlow, and owner along with his family, of 7,500 acres of primarily forest land in five tracts in Hardin County; the family holding began in 1881 when I.W. Ross, a Civil War veteran, farmer, county sheriff and county trustee in Hardin County, along with H.R. Hinkle, bought the Ross homeplace; and

WHEREAS, the family holdings grew with the buying-out of the Hinkle interests and the further acquisitions by sons E.W., J. W. and H. E. Ross; eventually E.W. Ross bought out his brothers' interests and left the holdings to his sons, John J. Ross, who died in 1969, and E.W. Ross, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, the family began enlightened forest management in 1972 with their first pine plantations and two years later entered into a Long -Term Conservation Agreement for permanent vegetation cover with the United States Department of Agriculture under the Rural Environmental Conservation Program; in 1979, the holdings were certified as a tree farm and later other management plans were instituted, written hunting leases were executed, and in 1990 E.W. Ross, Jr. willed his half interest to his nephew, John J. Ross, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, Ross Forests, LLC was created by John J. Ross, Jr., Louise Ross Trust, Nellie Ross Trust, Christina D. Ross and Elizabeth H. Ross, and the next year converted to a general partnership; that year, remaining row crop land along the creek bottoms and old CRP land was enrolled in the Forestry and Wildlife CRP plan; and

WHEREAS, some 400 acres of the newly enrolled land was planted in pine, with food plots and wildlife shrubs included; other fields were planted in oak and other native hardwoods and fruit trees and shrubs. Prescribed burning was instituted on field margins, creek banks and under mature pine, and bark beetle damaged pine stands were harvested and replanted; and

WHEREAS, since the turn of the century, recreational use has been enhanced by the construction of mountain bike and hiking trails, a wetland reserve program planted in wetland hardwoods has been instituted, 22 acres on limestone bluffs with mature pine and hardwood have been reserved for a maintained natural state and the partnership entered into a five-year contract for inventory and development of a management plan for protection of biodiversity; and

WHEREAS, John Ross, Jr. renovated the family cabin built by his parents, and the family has long used it for daily outings, mountain biking and as a swimming base. The land constitutes a long-term investment for producing income from the sale of forest products; that it does so much more in providing recreational hunting, wildlife habitat and biodiversity is a testament to Mr. Ross' enlightened stewardship; and

WHEREAS, in keeping with his interest in tree farming and sustainable forestry management, John J. Ross, Jr. serves as a trustee with the Nature Conservancy, and he has also become a member of the Tennessee Heritage Alliance, as evidenced by the preservation of the James Graham home, a Virginia "I" House, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, several sites of prehistoric American Indian settlements and his past membership on the board for the Tennessee River Museum; and

WHEREAS, though no rare or endangered species have been identified on the property, it is available for surveys of rare and endangered species, and if found they will be protected; the three existing wetland areas, two of which were beaver-created and the third a slough on the edge of a large field, are also to be protected; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Ross recognizes that managed hunting is a contributor to a healthy wildlife population in the absence of major predators; lesser predators such as bobcats and coyotes are tolerated. Preference is given to local hunters lessees who prepare food plots, maintain roads and trails and are required to have liability insurance; and

WHEREAS, management of stream banks in many cases requires them to be no harvest areas, and in a washout area on Horse Creek bank three stone jetties have been built as an NRCS demonstration project for stream stabilization; and

WHEREAS, although the harvest from pine plantations is the major revenue source, no new pine plantations are planned, except in the case of severely degraded hardwood stands on sites better suited to pine, and old pine stands that are harvested will be evaluated as to whether they are more suited to new pine plantings or natural regeneration of hardwood; the result will be that no more than eighty percent of the holdings will be in pine; and

WHEREAS, the consistent use of thinning, herbicides where appropriate and prescribed burning continue to optimize wildlife habitat and aesthetic value, scenic buffers, natural areas along roads, waterfalls and streams and the preservation of outstanding examples of various species and stands of native trees, all are part and parcel of the management of Ross Forests Partnership Farm; and

WHEREAS, John Lindsey, Land Management Forester for Forest Management in Savannah says of John J. Ross, Jr., "Mr. Ross is an ideal tree farmer because he personally uses and manages his forest for wood, water, wildlife and recreation on an almost daily basis."; at its meeting in Nashville, the Tennessee Forestry Association announced that John J. Ross, Jr., was its "2003 Tree Farmer of the Year" for his longtime membership and commitment to the association and for his outstanding stewardship of the land; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly pause in its deliberations to honor this outstanding Tennessean; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we congratulate Mr. John J. Ross, Jr. for having been named by the Tennessee Forestry Association as the "2003 Tree Farmer of the Year" and thank him for his

careful and forward-looking stewardship of our state's precious renewable resources -- our forestland and wildlife habitat.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we extend to Mr. Ross and his family our best wishes for every success in their future endeavors and much continuing happiness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.

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